

## **Historic, Archive Document**

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



a821  
A83F6

exp. 5

Through most of history, the human struggle for food has been directed primarily at simply getting enough to eat. This has led to government food policies that have focused mainly on increased production, better means of food preservation, and improved systems for the transportation and distribution of food.

Now, we are at a point where we have achieved a high degree of success in satisfying our domestic needs for adequate production, preservation, and distribution. Yet out of our very successes, new and troubling issues arise.

Today, production in this country is so large and reliable that we are able to feed ourselves and a large portion of the rest of the world and use food sales to help balance trade deficits. But this has also meant that we have recurring surpluses and that producers have trouble surviving.

Today, although millions of Americans are unable to get enough to eat without assistance, for millions of others nutritional problems are a result of consuming too much food.

Today we have become so successful in using chemicals to increase production, retard spoilage and preserve foods that we must now be concerned with the health effects of chemicals themselves.

Today, we have become so dependent upon food processing and upon nationwide food distribution systems that the farm value of production bears little relationship to final costs of food.

---

Remarks by Carol Tucker Foreman, Assistant Secretary for Food and Consumer Services before the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council, Washington, D.C., December 8, 1977

---

And today, because domestic population growth is leveling off and urbanization has slowed down, the rate of increase in domestic demand for food -- which has been growing dramatically for years -- may be slowing down.

We need to begin giving the most serious consideration to forging a new food policy -- a policy that responds to the dilemmas facing us today. The Federal government must respond to these changing needs. At the USDA, we are beginning those adjustments.

In the future we should work toward a food policy that has nutrition as its first goal.

Secretary Bob Bergland has said, "We need to develop a nutrition policy and build our food and farm policy on that rather than the other way around."

To a large extent, this reversal requires a start from scratch. I've tried to outline what such a policy might include.

First, we must figure out the nutritional needs of Americans -- no easy task, as you know. From that, we have to determine the levels and types of production needed to meet those needs.

Second, we have to decide the role this nation will play with regard to feeding the world.

Third, we must determine what measures will be needed to stimulate and sustain that level of production.

Fourth, we have to make sure that food is available at a reasonable cost.

Fifth, we must assure that it is safe and of high quality.

And finally, we must include programs that get food to people who can't afford to buy it even at reasonable prices.

(more)

So food production is a link in the chain rather than the whole chain. The end of the chain, if all goes well, is a nutritious diet for everyone. That would be perhaps the greatest achievement in public health and welfare in this century.

That's where you come in. The Food and Nutrition Board has a long and impressive history. It has performed well in the development of standards of safety for food staples, by its work on natural toxicants and by its preparation of the Food Chemicals Codex.

But, as the Report of your visiting committee pointed out last September, this is a time when we all, including the FNB, must change to meet the change that is all around us.

We in the USDA need your assistance in developing our food policy.

Before government can successfully generate a food policy based on nutrition, we must know what human nutritional needs are and what the impact of diet on health really is.

The RDA's of various nutrients are important, but we need, in addition, information about the specific needs of various groups and individuals within these groups.

We need standards, or guidelines, based on an individual's age, sex, lifestyle, work environment, racial or ethnic traits, overall health and geographic location. These standards should provide the nutritional basis for optimal growth, performance and continued well being.

This calls for an increased commitment to nutrition research. We at the USDA want to make such a commitment, especially in light of our new statutory responsibilities in that area.

Another critical need is for research concerning the relationship between diet and disease. In the past, diet-related diseases were always linked to deficiency. Today, however, we seem to face contradictory diet-disease problems. While some people suffer from inadequate amounts of certain nutrients, others suffer from diseases brought on by the overconsumption of food in general and foods high in fat and salt and sugar in particular.

Current information on nutrition and diet is limited. Neither the USDA Food Consumption Survey or the HEW, HANES Study meets all of our needs.

We need other research on the affects of processing on why people choose the foods they do.

Further research is important. It is the first element of food policy. But today, after I leave you, I have to go back to the USDA and administer programs that eat up about 9 billion of your taxes each year to feed needy Americans and school children. I have to make decisions today about what to feed them. I also administer programs that are mandated to assure that the meat and poultry products you get are wholesome and accurately labeled. Once again, I will have to act today.

I need your help in that action and so I want to talk to you about three things: humility, probability and reality.

I have one major complaint about nutritional scientists. Most of you are too humble.

Your science has risen to high fashion. People hang on your utterances. The public worries that what they eat may kill them and they look to you for help.

In general, of course, scientific humility is commendable. The more we learn about a subject the more there is to know. That attitude is the hallmark of an educated and open mind.

The trouble is, human nutrition is not a science that can be left in the laboratories until the final answers are found. People eat every day. Farmers produce, and processors process. We in government are required by law -- and, indeed, by common sense -- to do what we can to improve the American diet. Most of this is done by education, such as the good old Recommended Daily Allowances. Some is done through the influence of our feeding programs. For example, we may eliminate fortified pastries and fortified milk drinks from the child nutrition program. Some of it is done by regulation, such as the process now underway to eliminate nitrosamines from cured meats.

All of what we do in this regard depends on what you do. It depends first on what you know. But it also depends on what you say.

If you speak, people will respond. Nutrition is the most human of sciences. That should give it a special place of honor in the laboratory, the university and the government. But that also requires that its practitioners be willing to speak to the public, to provide the information they need to make intelligent choices.

That brings me to the subject of probability. We in government have to settle a lot of issues on the basis of what's probably right.

A current example is the debate over the dietary goals published by the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs. Mind you, I am carefully picking a report I didn't write. It is from Congress, not the Agriculture Department.

As all of you know, the report by and large asserts that Americans would be healthier if they ate less saturated fat, less sugar and salt, and more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and unsaturated fats. Some scientists have expressed horror because the scientific case for some of the recommended changes is tentative. But it is not as if the report was a rocket that should not be launched until it is fail safe.

We in government aren't poised to change the public food supply by pushing buttons. We have no such buttons. Most people change their own eating habits very gradually, if at all.

The questions raised by that report, it seems to me, are ones that merit consideration and action.

The nutrition community has never come to an agreement about the Dietary Goals. Instead, scientists argue methodology, decimal points and technicalities. But the public wants guidance, not 100 percent certainty. If the exact number is wrong, but everyone agrees that the general idea is correct -- that is what the public wants to know.

The question is not, is it absolutely definite that a high percentage of animal fat in the diet is harmful? There is some evidence of that, of course. The most pertinent question is, is there any evidence that reducing the amount of saturated fat in the diet may be harmful to health? I am unaware that there is such evidence. If there is agreement that reducing the level of animal fat is not harmful and some evidence that high levels are harmful, why not say that and act on that? And, if the recent studies showing a decline in heart disease is any indication, people are willing to follow good, common-sense advice about their health.

The issue of nutrition and health is closely related to another element of our nutrition-based food policy -- the assurance of food quality and safety.

Here too science and government must work closely and ought to share the same goals. Although food safety is virtually unchallenged as an appropriate goal, the means to achieving it has been in dispute for over 80 years.

Federal efforts to assure food safety date back to the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. Since then other acts such as the Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act have made it federal policy to protect the public from unsafe chemicals and manufacturing processes.

A food policy that has as its first concern the nutritional well being of the public can ill afford to be less rigorous than present law.

Yet the decisions about chemicals in foods frequently seem to border on the ridiculous. The public has difficulty in deciphering a debate over how many parts per billion of a particular substance should be allowed or the relevance of tumors in rats.

The industry scoffs at the significance of data and threatens rising prices. The short term costs are up front and certain.

The long term threat is distant or murky. And pressures are great not to act until we know beyond any shadow of doubt. But I believe government must act now to protect the public.

The alternative is to follow our historical pattern of waiting for a tragedy before we act. Almost every advance in our food and drug laws has resulted from an exposé or a tragedy. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 followed publication of Upton Sinclair's exposé of filthy meat plants. On two occasions since then, exposés have spawned other laws. The 1938 drug law resulted from deaths caused by a patent medicine, and the 1962 drug law followed the thalidomide tragedy. Public policy has been directed more by tragic events than by rational scientific action.

We are determined to avert tragedy, not react to it. To make it work, we need public support from scientists. We need you to be involved--not aloof.

But we may have to go further than present law in food safety and quality regulation. Government action to promote food safety may need to enter new areas. Present laws deal with food additives and manufacturing processes. Yet evidence now suggests links between high consumption levels of substances such as salt and fat, and such diseases as high blood pressure and a variety of cancers. A food policy concerned with food safety should be able to deal with these problems as well. Perhaps we should become as concerned about the fat in a hot dog as we are about the nitrite. We need the counsel of scientists and quickly.

Government policy must also deal with the emerging issue of food quality. Public policy should address more adequately such questions as the construction and composition of processed foods. Industry is engaged in a constant effort to bring new technology to food processing. The results are sometimes ice cream that is not like what mother used to make, or tissue from ground bone in hot dogs. It is unlikely that public policy should exclude the results of new technology from the marketplace but it must find better ways to assure consumers that the quality of new foods -- their nutritional value, taste and appearance -- are as good or better than the previous product. We must also find better ways to differentiate between products associated with certain basic materials or processing methods and those made in laboratories or with new ingredients or methods so that customers will understand what they are purchasing.

Consumers have the right to know what is in the food they buy. I have run into some trouble with the meat industry because the USDA is asking that hog dogs containing tissue from ground bone be labeled as such. There is nothing unhealthy about tissue from ground bone, but people should know that that is what they are paying for; they may choose in that case to buy something else or they may not. But they deserve the option.

Finally, food policy must also deal with those people who do not have the ability to afford an adequate diet. Present government policy supports food for such individuals through a variety of programs that approach the problem in various ways. The Food Stamp program increases food consumption by increasing income and limiting the increase to food purchases. The School Breakfast, School Lunch and other child nutrition programs provide meals in an institutional setting. The Women, Infants, Children food program (WIC) provides prescription food packages to vulnerable persons at nutritional risk during the most critical phase of human growth and development.

For those who cannot afford to feed themselves adequately, nutrition research and education and food safety regulations are irrelevant.

USDA institutional food assistance programs should be nutrition-based programs not just surplus distribution programs. That means that we must go beyond just giving out food stamps or school lunches. We should also make sure, for instance, that school meals are nutritious and well prepared well enough that children want to eat them.

We are trying to make sure that USDA programs do not encourage poor eating habits. We have proposed to remove fortified fruit-grain products and we have ended the use of formulated milk products in institutional feeding programs. If a child receives a fortified product that resembles a standard high sugar, high fat, low everything else sweet, it is reasonable to assume that he or she will not be able to tell the difference between the two. Concerned nutritionists were active in bringing the Department to this decision.

New regulations for the school lunch program will improve the nutritional quality of meals and, we hope, cut down on plate waste. No matter how good a food is, it does no one any good when a child winds up throwing it away.

We want our institutional food programs to become learning laboratories for good nutrition -- teaching by example that food can be nutritious and appetizing at the same time. Nutrition professionals, from laboratory researchers to dieticians, should be a part of this effort. We need researchers who will examine child nutrition needs and we need practitioners, full of solid information and imaginative ideas, who care about children's health to plan and prepare school meals.

The Women, Infant, Children feeding program has perhaps the greatest capacity to use good nutrition to improve health and assist in breaking the cycle of poor childhood development that is often associated with poor nutrition. It provides high quality protein, iron, calcium and Vitamins A and C to pregnant women, nursing mothers and young children. Because WIC operates through health care programs, it integrates health care, nutrition education and food assistance. It has been shown to result in substantially increased visits to prenatal and neonatal health clinics -- as well as in the increased consumption of nutritious foods during a critical growth stage.

WIC is an example of what can be done when research is applied to real people, in ways that affect them today -- food assistance -- and in the future -- education. The results can mean improved health and, for children, an improved overall physical and mental development.

We in government who carry a responsibility for human nutrition do not like to tug and pull at the scientific community. We would much rather follow it. John Dewey once wrote that "Every great advance in science has issued from a new audacity of imagination." A more ordinary way of saying that is "Behold the turtle, he makes progress by sticking his neck out." We are looking to you for audacity, imagination, and more: A willingness to join us in the day-to-day work of improving the nutrition and health of all Americans.

U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE  
NAT'L. AGRIC. LIBRARY  
MAR 24 1978  
#.#.#.#.#